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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000257

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DAKAR PLS PASS ODC, DAO, AND RAO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/17/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [SG](#) [GA](#)

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: MEDIA ATTACK ON SENEGAL, CONVICTION OF
GOS OFFICIALS

REF: A. BANJUL 250 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. DAKAR 250 (ALL NOTAL)

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) A pro-GOTG daily led May 17 with report of recent meeting of Gambian dissidents and GOS Interior Ministry officials in Dakar as part of anti-GOTG plotting; a reported participant denied the report. On the previous day, May 16, the trial of five Senegalese customs officials ended with their conviction and sentencing to prison for 18 months. Ambassador flagged concern over the reports of escalating tensions with Senegal in meeting with Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary, who declined to discuss specific irritants, beyond alleging GOS delay in responding to GOTG's request for concurrence in proposed tariff hikes for Gambia River ferries. Rumors persist of a possibly imminent Senegalese move to close the border with The Gambia. END SUMMARY.

MEDIA ATTACK ON SENEGAL

[1](#)2. (C) Indicative of mounting strains in the Senegalese/Gambian relationship, a pro-government journal, Daily Observer, led May 17 with the story that Gambian dissidents in Senegal had recently held a secret meeting in Dakar with GOS Interior Ministry officials. Portraying the meeting as reflecting "the ugly face of Senegalese jealousy" toward The Gambia, the paper indicated that the meeting was devoted to plotting against the GOTG. Among the Gambian attendees, it named former Chief of Defense Staff and presumed mastermind of the March 2006 abortive coup, Ndure Cham, former head of the State Guard (Presidential security force), Kalifa Bajinka, and Sana Sabally, who was a senior member of the junta established following President Jammeh's 1994 coup, but subsequently fell out with Jammeh and served a prison sentence for treason before taking up residence in Senegal. The paper asserted that Senegalese officials at the meeting gave assurances that the Gambian dissidents "will be protected and cared for as long as they wish to remain in Senegal." (NOTE: On May 17, Bajinka phoned a FSN employee at the Embassy and denied that any such meeting had occurred. END NOTE)

SENEGALESE CUSTOMS OFFICIALS CONVICTED

¶3. (SBU) Meanwhile, the trial of five Senegalese customs officials (ref a) concluded May 16 with the conviction of all and sentencing to 18 months' imprisonment at hard labor, with no option of payment of a fine in lieu of incarceration.

According to media reports, the five officials, allegedly manning a boat in pursuit of smugglers when picked up by Gambian authorities, were convicted of unlawful entry into Gambian waters and illegal possession of firearms (i.e. service weapons on board their craft). (COMMENT: The defendants were represented by a prominent Gambian attorney, Antouman Gaye, who previously told us that he saw no genuine grounds for prosecution. He maintained that both international law and relevant Senegalese/Gambian agreements sanctioned the officials' entry into Gambian waters in pursuit of smugglers. END COMMENT)

MEETING WITH GOTG OFFICIAL

¶4. (C) In May 16 meeting with senior Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Bai Ousman Secka, Ambassador registered concern over reports of growing strains with Senegal and urged the GOTG to do its part to ease tensions through dialog and avoid any precipitous action that could further inflame matters. Secka declined to discuss the tensions with Senegal, beyond complaining that some months ago the GOTG, as required by the relevant bilateral agreement, had sought -- but still awaited -- GOS concurrence in raising tariffs for the Gambia River ferries heavily used by Senegalese transporters in travelling between northern Senegal and the Casamance region to the south. Secka did give assurances of the GOTG's commitment to resolving "all issues with Senegal" through peaceful, diplomatic means.

COMMENT

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¶5. (C) Permanent Secretary Secka professed ignorance of persistent rumors that a Senegalese move to close the border with The Gambia could be imminent. The Daily Observer article is a replay of long-standing Gambian allegations of Senegalese harboring of dissidents and support for their efforts to destabilize The GOTG. The article's mention of presumed coup plot mastermind Ndure Cham among dissidents in the alleged meeting with Senegalese officials underscores the GOTG's conviction -- despite past GOS denials -- that Cham remains in Senegal and under GOS protection. On the GOTG's unhelpful posture, we note Embassy Dakar's assessment, per ref b, of around 28 MFDC leaders and other rebels in detention here; we share speculation in Senegal that they were picked up as part of GOTG's support for a rival MFDC figure opposed to peace efforts, Salif Sadio. END COMMENT

STAFFORD